

## **SO YOU ARE INTERESTED IN BECOMING A FEDERAL COURT INTERPRETER?**

Congratulations! It is a very satisfying and lucrative profession. The media has recently published that there is a great need for federally certified interpreters, which is true.

Unfortunately, the issue was framed as a need for COURT INTERPRETERS instead of for FEDERALLY CERTIFIED COURT INTERPRETERS.

Federal statute, Public Law 95-539, October 28, 1978, codified as Title 28 U.S.C. §1827, makes it mandatory for the Federal Courts to establish a program to certify interpreters and then to use only certified interpreters for proceedings initiated by the United States in the Federal Courts.

To implement federal statute, the Administrative Office of the United States Courts has established a certification program that is currently being managed by the National Center for State Courts. The certification program consists of a two-step examination. The first step is a written examination that historically has been passed by about 20% of the candidates taking it. You are eligible to sit for the oral examination only after you have taken and passed the written examination. The oral examination has historically been passed also by about 20% of those who are eligible to take. Thus, the total passing rate of the certification examination is 20% of 20%, or about 4% of those candidates who initially enrolled to take the exam.

Why is it so difficult to pass the examination? There are two answers.

The first answer lies on the fact that, although there are no formal educational requirements to take the exam, all experts have agreed that in order to pass the examination the candidate must possess knowledge of English AND of Spanish at a level equivalent to that acquired by at least two or three years of college both in English and in Spanish. Does this mean in any way that only if you have from two to three years of college Spanish and English you will

pass? No, because you may have acquired throughout your life experience enough vocabulary to pass the exam without having the formal education. But it does mean that, even if you have two or three years of college in Spanish and in English, you may still fail the exam, because it is not the formal education that is required, but the vocabulary that normally results from that college education.

The second answer resides in that the difficulty and great expense involved in administering each exam make it impossible to offer both exams every year. Therefore, written examinations have been historically offered during even-numbered years and the oral exams during odd-numbered years.

Therefore, in order to become a federally certified interpreter, you will have to take a written examination one year and, if you pass, you will be eligible to take the oral exam offered the following year.

The last written examination offered was in August of 2002. Only those candidates who successfully passed the exam last year will have the right to take the oral exam that is to be administered in August of 2003.

What this means is that if you are interested in becoming a federally certified interpreter right now, you will have to wait until August of 2004 to take the written exam and then, upon passing, you will be eligible to take the oral exam in August of 2005.

As you see, these are the reasons why there is a great need for federally certified interpreters. At last count about 20,000 candidates have taken the initial exam and there are only little over 800 federally certified interpreters in all the United States.

If you are interested in becoming a federally certified interpreter, please contact the “Federal Court Interpreter Certification Project” at 916-263-3494 or write them an e-mail at [fcice-spanish@cps.ca.gov](mailto:fcice-spanish@cps.ca.gov).

The best of luck in your endeavor to become a federally certified interpreter! Remember, we need interpreters very much, although it may take a long time and be a very difficult road, it is possible to make it and it is greatly satisfying to work in this field.

You will become the ears and voice of all our fellow Spanish-speakers who have no knowledge of English in the Federal Court System and you will be able to put them on an equal footing with any other English-speaking person.

Congratulations for your interest and have a happy new year!!!